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SUBJECT: EU/CHINA ARMS: DAS SUCHAN VISIT LAUNCHES PUBLIC DEBATE

REF: SUCHAN E-MAIL 10/7/04

Classified By: POL/MC Kyle Scott. Reasons: 1.4 (B)(D)

1. (C) SUMMARY: PM DAS Greg Suchan's October 7 visit to discuss US opposition to lifting the EU arms embargo on China included meetings with select PSC Ambassadors, as well as a public briefing and press conference/backgrounders which resulted in widespread and generally positive coverage in European media outlets. END SUMMARY.

Meeting Select EU Member States

2. (C) PM DAS Greg Suchan discussed US concerns over lifting the EU arms embargo on China with a select group EU Political and Security Committee (PSC) ambassadors from smaller countries that had not been on his recent travels to European capitals. In attendance were PSC Ambassadors from Luxembourg, Denmark, Poland and Lithuania, plus the chief Asia advisor in HiRep Solana's Policy Unit. Suchan stressed the political, military and human rights aspects of our opposition to lifting the arms ban, and said that EU efforts to assuage our concerns had been far from sufficient. EU assurances that lifting the ban would have no material consequence were hard to believe, he said, because market pressures and lobbying by Beijing would make it very hard for member state regulators to deny sales to China without the political cover of an arms embargo. Citing the high rate of reported military sales to China in recent years under both the embargo and/or Code of Conduct (almost 210 million Euros in 2002, amounting to 17 license issuances for every one denial), Suchan stressed that even a strengthened Code could be no substitute for the embargo. European governments should not deceive themselves into thinking they can convince the US that it would be okay to lift the embargo, he cautioned. And if a decision to lift is taken, the EU should expect a strong reaction from Washington.

Luxembourg: We Need Mutual Trust

3. (C) Ambassador Paul Duhr of Luxembourg said his government hoped the matter would be resolved before the start of its Presidency on January 1. Speaking for the group (and as de facto EU lead since the Dutch Ambassador was not present), Duhr said there was no intention of selling more arms or military technology to China after the embargo is lifted. US concerns are being taken "very seriously," he said, although it was also important to recognize China's positive changes in recent years. He said that "a majority of member states favor a lift," but that serious arguments against it remain; it would take time to iron them out. He understood that we were still not satisfied with EU assurances that lifting the ban would have no material impact, but said that we needed to proceed "on the basis of mutual trust if transatlantic relations are to be respectful." The US and EU needed to "respect each others' autonomy in foreign policy, while trusting each other not to endanger their critical interests," he said. He added that the (not yet agreed) "Toolbox" addendum to the Code of Conduct was designed to reassure the US that no increase in sales to China would result from lifting the embargo. On Suchan's description of possible US reactions to lifting the embargo, Duhr cautioned that we would lose sympathy in the EU if we are perceived as threatening Congressional retaliation. "They will drop their doubts and join the pro-lift camp," he said.

Denmark and Policy Unit: Human Rights

4. (C) Ambassador Reimer Nielsen of Denmark acknowledged that his country was still uneasy about the human rights implications of ending the embargo. China "hasn't delivered what we want yet," he said, which makes it difficult to make a decision on lifting the embargo. Council Policy Advisor Tomaz Koslowski (himself a former Polish Ambassador to China) argued that China's human rights record had improved significantly since 1989 and that Beijing's progress should be recognized. China's openness to dialogue is a good sign and a major accomplishment, he said. Koslowski said it was "extremely important to note" that in EU discussions there

has been "no mention" of increasing arms sales to China. He also underscored that the embargo is vague and not legally binding, while the Code of Conduct calls for EU Member States not to endanger the interests of friends and allies.

Poland and Lithuania: Feeling Stuck

15. (C) Polish Ambassador Maciej Popowski added only that the EU is a "community of rules" and that Member States generally respect those rules and are working to tighten them (a reference to the effort to strengthen the Code of Conduct). Lithuanian Ambassador Arnoldas Milukas said that Vilnius favored revising the Code of Conduct to be as legally binding as possible. He expressed serious concern about the political implications of lifting the embargo, and said that Lithuania was "very concerned for transatlantic relations."

PD Events Result in Widespread Coverage

16. (SBU) The main purpose of Suchan's visit was an on-the-record briefing on October 7 at the Center for European Policy Studies (CEPS) in Brussels. Sharing the dais were Amnesty International's EU Director Dick Oosting and USEU Defense Policy Advisor Col. Mike Ryan. The briefing was followed by a press conference at CEPS and follow-on exclusives for Reuters and Wall Street Journal Europe. During the press events, DAS Suchan outlined points similar to those in para 2. The two CEPS events were attended by most major wire services and several dailies -- including two Chinese newspapers -- and resulted in positive and widespread, often front page, coverage during the October 8-9 news cycle. USEU Political Minister-Counselor followed up with an interview for BBC World Service on October 8.

17. (U) DAS Suchan has cleared this message.

McKinley